

## South Diamond Bar Community Chapter

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### Introduction

This Community Chapter presents a specific vision through targeted goals, policies, and implementation actions that build upon the guiding framework of the ESGVAP for the unincorporated community of South Diamond Bar, located in the southeastern part of the planning area. This Community Chapter also draws upon the policies in the General Plan, the LA County Sustainability Plan, the Community Climate Action Plan, and other applicable County and regional plans that address regional planning concerns to craft policies and programs specific to these two unincorporated areas.

### Community Vision

The vision for the South Diamond Bar is an unpopulated community of undisturbed habitat areas with biological and natural resources that are protected and preserved in perpetuity.

### Background

South Diamond Bar is a largely undisturbed natural area with no population. It consists of 5.6 square miles, located in the southeast part of the planning area. South Diamond Bar shares boundaries with Diamond Bar to the north, Chino Hills to the east, Orange County to the south, and the unincorporated community of Rowland Heights to the west. The area also contains the Firestone Boy Scout Reservation. Tonner Canyon Rd. is the primary road that runs through the northwest part of South Diamond Bar. In addition, SR-57 runs along the western boundary through natural areas, connecting to Orange County and SR-60.

All of South Diamond Bar is designated as part of the Puente Hills Significant Ecological Area (SEA) providing important habitat and wildlife linkages. Tonner Canyon contains natural flowing creeks and wetlands and is a major drainage area for streams and waterways. Nearly the entire SEA is designated as the Puente-Chino Hills State Important Bird Area by Audubon California and represents the one of the only large areas of relatively undisturbed habitat left in the southeastern County. Walnut woodlands, southern oak woodlands, chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and riparian woodlands are critical habitat found in this area. Tonner Canyon also supports a diversity and abundance of wildlife. Large mammals, overwintering birds of prey, and songbirds are found here. The California gnatcatcher and coastal cactus wren have critical habitat in this area.

The following Figures SDB-1, *South Diamond Bar Land Use Policy Map*, and SDB-2, *South Diamond Bar Zoning Map* presents land use and zoning designations and establishes the general location and diversity of each land use in South Diamond Bar.

## Issues and Opportunities

The following presents a summary of issues and opportunities learned from community feedback as well as an analysis of existing conditions in the community. These issues and opportunities serve to inform the preparation of community-specific policies and programs for South Diamond Bar.

### 1. *Preservation Community*

The entire community is located within the Puente Hills SEA, Hillside Management Area (HMA), and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ), with a small portion also found within the 100-year flood plain. There is currently no significant development found within South Diamond Bar and there is a population of zero. Existing development within the community is limited to the SR-57 to the west and the main Tonner Canyon Rd, the Firestone Scout Reservation campsite located in the center of the community, and smaller campsites located to the northeast. These conditions make the community unsuitable for growth and prime for preservation. The natural land, resources, and wildlife should remain in preservation.

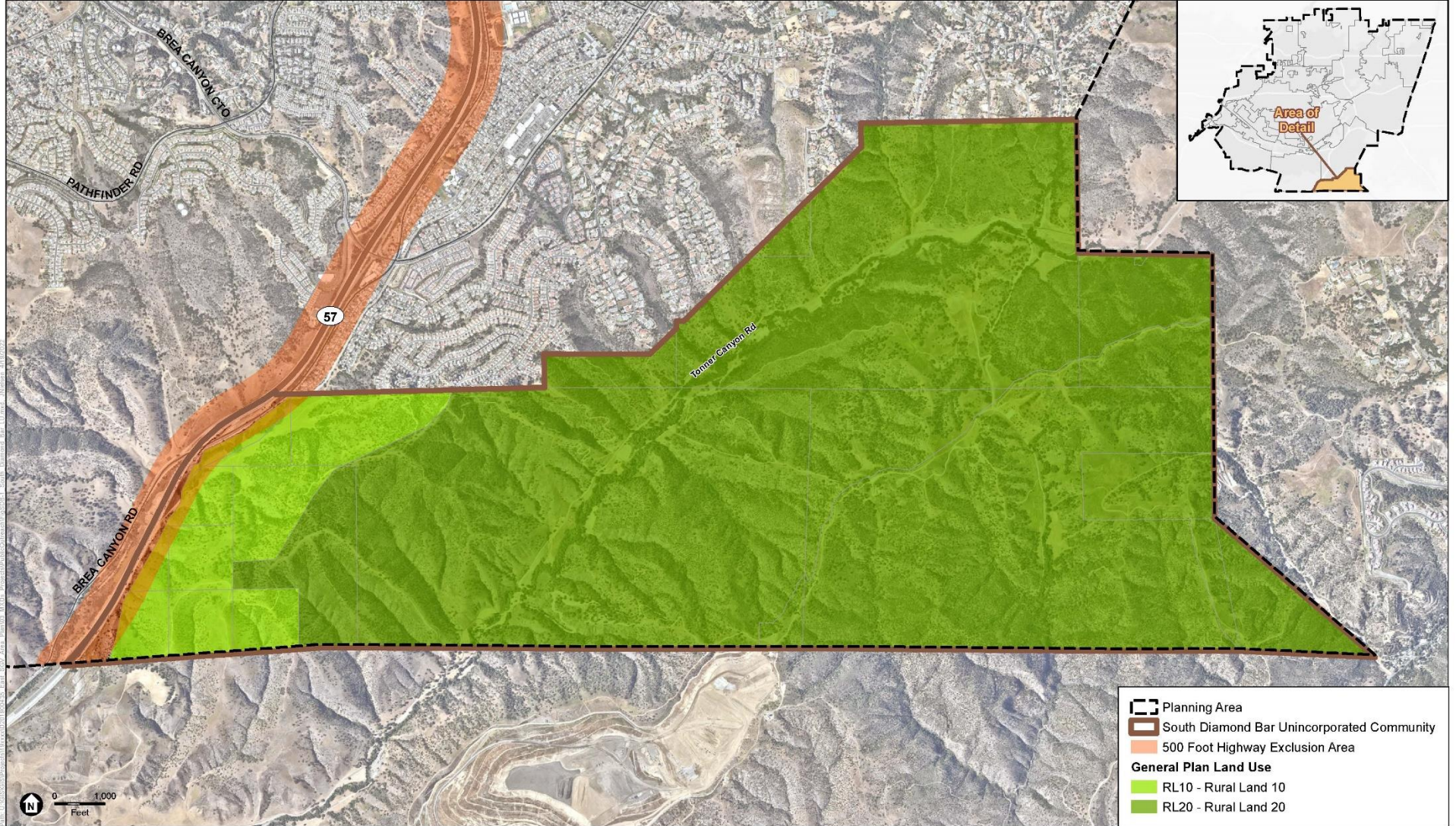
### 2. *Vacant Parcels*

Though there are vacant parcels throughout the entire community, development should be avoided as they are located within the very high fire hazard zone, SEA, and critical habitat areas. Vacant parcels within the community are not suitable for development due to existing environmental hazards and the presence of significant biological resources.

### 3. *Limiting Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)*

There is currently no significant development in South Diamond Bar. The area is largely undisturbed natural area, with natural watercourses, and a wealth of sensitive biological resources that are becoming increasingly threatened by development spreading into previously undeveloped areas and expansion of the WUI. A significant proportion of recent growth and development of residences and religious or institutional campuses have taken place within the WUI in the ESGV with considerable negative impacts to biological resources and wildlife, exacerbating wildfire hazard threats for both residential populations and habitat, in addition to causing further habitat fragmentation and threats to wildlife. Development encroaching into habitat areas also impacts the ability of wildlife to move unimpeded and increases the loss of already threatened habitat areas. The increased presence of roads results in collisions and increased danger to wildlife.





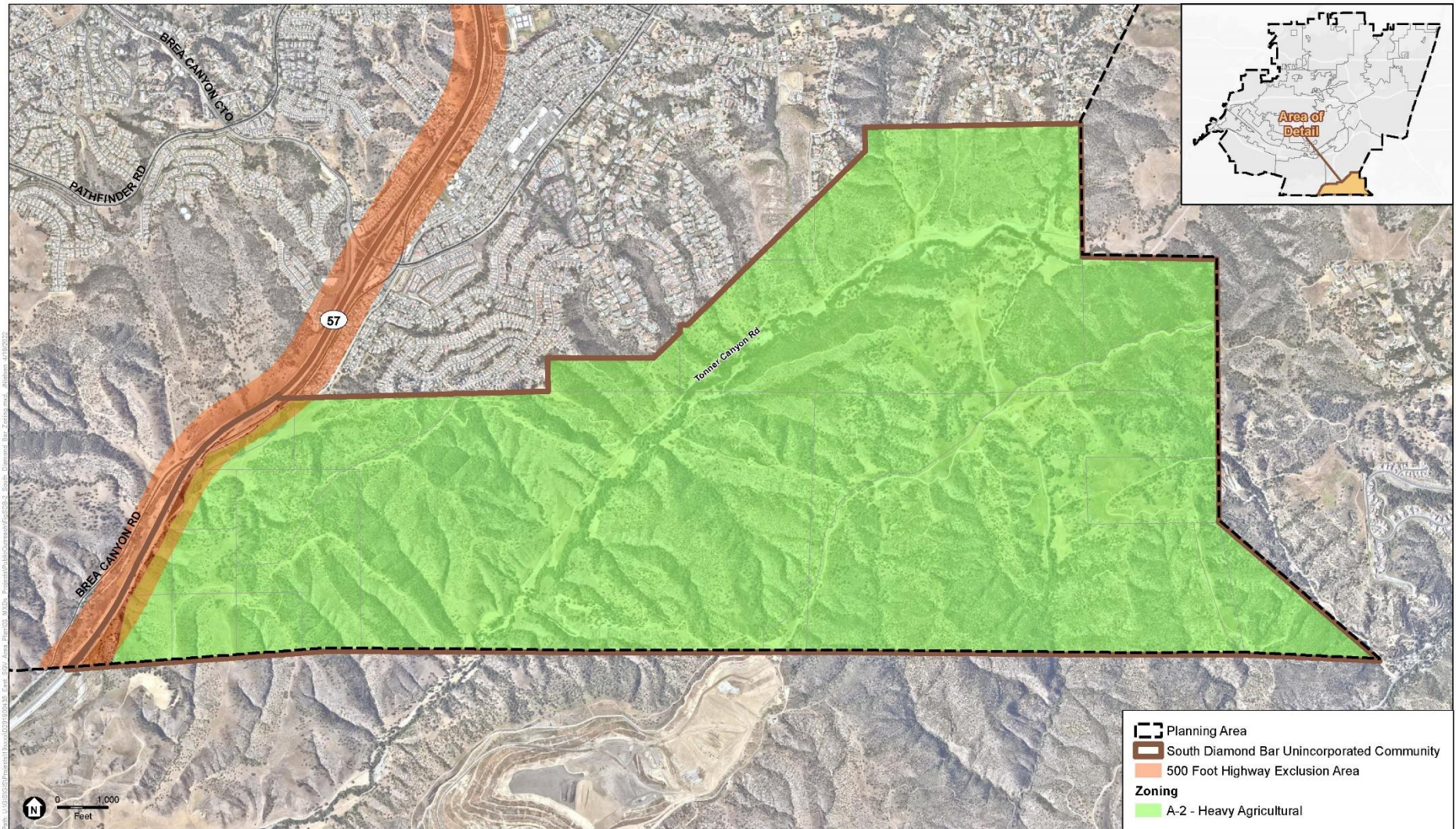
SOURCE: ESRI; Los Angeles County GIS; Nearmap; ESA, 2022.



East San Gabriel Valley Area Plan

**Figure SDB-1**  
South Diamond Bar Land Use Policy Map





SOURCE: ESRI; Los Angeles County GIS; Nearmap; ESA, 2022.

East San Gabriel Valley Area Plan

**Figure SDB-2**  
South Diamond Bar Zoning Map



All of South Diamond Bar falls within the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ). In the ESGV, most structures built within the WUI are within the VHFHSZ. This is particularly concerning with the predicted increase in the frequency and severity of wildfires as a result of climate change. Increased development and land uses at the urban periphery introduce structures, roads, vehicle traffic, and people into previously undeveloped areas, and increases the probability of ignitions within wildland areas. Nearly all wildfire ignitions in the Los Angeles County in recent times were human-caused, often by electrical equipment, vehicles, fireworks, debris burning, smoking, campfires, or arson. As wildfire risks mount due to climate change, the significant threats that would face new development and wildland areas is a primary concern in future land use decision-making. Given the severity of the threats, further development in these high-risk areas should be completely avoided.

#### *4. Preservation of Biological Resources*

South Diamond Bar is part of the Puente Hills SEA which has been designated a State Important Bird Area (IBA) by Audubon California. The South Diamond Bar portion of the SEA contains the natural areas of the Firestone Boy Scout Reservation, with its focal area of Tonner Canyon. Several plant communities within this SEA are CDFW highest priority communities and include walnut woodland, which is scattered throughout this SEA; oak riparian woodland, which is best developed in the major drainage of Tonner Canyon, but is found elsewhere; stands of southern willow scrub along many of the drainages; scattered freshwater marsh; and coastal sage scrub, which is found in scattered patches over hillsides throughout.

There is a small area of coastal gnatcatcher critical habitat in the Firestone Boy Scout Reservation that connects to the large area of critical habitat in Orange County and the Chino Hills. The SEA hosts migrating and resident birds that use the extensive mosaic of lowland terrestrial habitats and extensive areas of grassland and oak and walnut woodlands. This IBA extends well beyond the SEA into Orange and San Bernardino counties, and in general, goes beyond the SEA boundaries in most places.

#### *5. Preservation of Significant Ridgelines*

The area contains several significant ridgelines that are also used for wildlife movement and serve as firebreaks in wildfires. Development along ridgelines for wildlife, habitat, and safety issues should be avoided. As with other communities located in the foothills, significant ridgelines should be identified, and protection requirements should be developed in a CSD or other regulatory mechanism for the planning area or countywide ordinance.

#### *6. Preservation of Wildlife Corridors*



The Puente Hills are a key area for wildlife movement connecting to the Chino Hills State Park. Because the floodplain and areas along the rivers have been developed, the primary mode of east-west movement for wildlife is through the Puente Hills. The area contains undeveloped, privately owned properties and land that is predominantly designated as SEA. There is a strong desire by residents in the community to see the wildlife corridor protected and preserved. With the increasing threats from climate change ensuring the ability of wildlife to migrate and maintaining continuity of open space areas is key for species survival.

The open spaces physically link the Puente/Chino Hills with the Santa Ana Mountains and the San Gabriel Mountains, respectively. By virtue of these linkages and a complex of interconnected habitat units throughout the hills, the Puente/Chino Hills function as both an important wildlife linkage and resident habitat area for regional wildlife populations. Within the SEA itself several habitat units exist and are well defined by the major canyon, Tonner Canyon. Tonner Canyon is capable of supporting a diversity and abundance of wildlife. More importantly, however, Tonner Canyon is connected to other major canyons throughout the ESGV, and these areas are connected by a series of open space corridors, which allows wildlife populations to migrate. The space and linkages for wildlife movement are crucial for the maintenance of biological diversity and population viability. This function is acutely important for wide-ranging species that meet their breeding and/or habitat requirements over broad areas.

Wildlife have been documented using major arterial roads and highways to cross the hills, mostly by use of dangerous surface crossings when wildlife undercrossings and passages are not available. The movement in the Puente Hills is largely east-west between large habitat areas in the western, central, and eastern portions of the SEA. Species documented as moving through the area include bobcat, coyote (*Canis latrans*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). Continued studies of wildlife crossing points should be undertaken to assess needed locations of future wildlife crossings. Safety in crossing roads and highways by the construction of dedicated wildlife crossings, separated from vehicular traffic is important for wildlife movement.

#### 7. *Preservation of Riparian Woodlands, Wetlands, Streams, and Natural Drainage Channels*

Los Angeles County has lost 95 percent of its original wetland areas, this includes the San Gabriel Valley floor which contained significant wetland resources historically. It is estimated that the San Gabriel Valley has lost 86% of its historical wetlands. Agricultural, and later urban and suburban development in the San Gabriel River watershed prompted channelizing the river and creeks. Native riparian vegetation was

removed for farmland and orchards, and river waters were diverted for crop production.

Riparian corridors, wetlands, streams, and natural drainages are found across South Diamond Bar, with its topographic variation, major and minor canyons, and water sources flowing down from higher elevations. The streams run downhill on the sloping terrain to collect at the base of the main canyon, Tonner Canyon, and the other minor canyons in the community. The protection of riparian areas, creeks, and natural drainages in their unaltered states provides irreplaceable ecosystem services, habitat, and water quality protections.

#### 8. *Critical Habitat for Endangered Species*

The southwest portion of South Diamond Bar, also in the Puente Hills SEA, is USFW designated critical habitat for the federally-threatened coastal gnatcatcher which is found in coastal sage scrubland all the way across the Puente Hills, heading into the southwest portions of South Diamond Bar and moving on into Orange County. Habitat loss is the primary threat to the species as coastal sage scrubland is eagerly sought by developers for residential development.

#### 9. *Habitat Fragmentation*

As the SEAs and sensitive habitat areas do have development on their southern edges, for the integrity of remaining habitat areas it is imperative to prevent further encroachment into designated biological resources areas. Conflicting needs exist countywide with increased pressures on limited housing supply; however, the need to preserve the continuity of the remaining habitat areas should not be compromised or negatively impacted by development needs.

#### 10. *Multi-jurisdiction Collaboration on Protection of SEAs, Habitat Conservation, and Wildlife Linkages*

The Puente Hills SEA designated on South Diamond Bar continues into the unincorporated communities of Rowland Heights and Hacienda Heights and into adjacent jurisdictions, including Diamond Bar, Industry, La Habra Heights, Montebello, Pico Rivera, South El Monte, and Whittier. In some cases, other jurisdictions may not yet have adopted a comparable program for protection of biological resources. In the past, some property owners have sought annexation to avoid the regulatory review and controls of the SEA program. We should follow through on opportunities for regional collaboration to protect natural and biological resources which exist across jurisdictional boundaries. Coordinated efforts to preserve and protect priority conservation areas is key to prevent further habitat fragmentation and loss.

#### 11. *Hazards*

All of South Diamond Bar is designated as VHFHSZ and therefore not suitable for land for development considering the increased threat of wildfire and the exacerbation of wildfires by encroachment of development into largely undisturbed natural areas. The southern part of Tonner Canyon is designated as a flood hazard area for the 100-year flood. Almost all of South Diamond Bar, which consists of sloping hillsides, is designated as a landslide hazard area. In addition, the bottom of Tonner Canyon, as a riparian and wetland area, is a designated liquefaction hazard zone.

## **Community-Specific Policies**

The following provides the policies for South Diamond Bar, organized to address the community-specific issues and opportunities presented above. Further, each policy is linked to a relevant guiding principle from Chapter 1 of this Plan.

### *VS 1 – Sustainable Growth Patterns*

**Policy SDB-1: Preservation.** Direct development away from natural and biological resource areas, including those identified in the Puente Hills SEA and those found on lands outside of the designated SEA. The SEA, HMA, and VHFHSZ designations make the community appropriate for preservation. Any potential new development or activity should work towards the goal of keeping South Diamond Bar preserved and protected in perpetuity.

**Policy SDB-2: Tonner Canyon.** Preserve Tonner Canyon, including its riparian oak woodlands, natural drainages, steams, wetlands, and creeks. Prohibit widening of Tonner Canyon Road and the development of any major or secondary highways for public use in South Diamond Bar.

### *VS 4 – Thriving Economy and Workforce*

**Policy SDB-3: Natural Lands Work.** Support the work and access of businesses, institutions and organizations engaged in the maintenance, conservation, and education of natural areas and resources.

**Policy SDB-4: Corridor Planning.** Support studies, planning, and implementation for wildlife corridor projects that enhance connectivity in South Diamond Bar and throughout the Puente Hills to Chino Hills and address fragmentation issues. Support works that assess the location needs and construction of safe and protected wildlife crossings, separated from vehicular traffic, especially to facilitate east-west movement of wildlife.



## *VS 5 – Shared Community Identity and Character*

**Policy SDB-5: Environmental Stewardship.** Support educational programming, community science, and local engagement to learn about the rare species and habitats located in South Diamond Bar and support community land stewardship practices to ensure the long-term survival and growth of threatened habitats and species.

## *VS 6 – A Sustainable Built and Natural Environment*

**Policy SDB-6: Natural Environment.** Avoid development within South Diamond Bar due to hazards and environmental designations, SEA, HMA, VHFHSZ, and flooding designations. Maintain the natural environment and resources within the community including vegetation, wildlife and habitats, waterways, and ridgelines.

**Policy SDB-7: Wildlife and Habitat Connectivity.** Preserve existing wildlife connections within South Diamond Bar and explore opportunities to provide new or enhanced connections that improve wildlife linkages and habitat for regional wildlife populations.

**Policy SDB-8: Biological Resources.** Protect biological resources and critical habitats for threatened and endangered species, and support collaborations with organizations, institutions, and other organizations within the region to preserve biological resources located on public- and privately owned land.

**Policy SDB-9: Hydrologic Resources.** Preserve wetland areas, natural drainages, and riparian corridors on undeveloped lands and direct development away from these areas.

**Policy SDB-10: Natural and Scenic Views.** Partner with neighboring jurisdictions to ensure preservation of natural and scenic views, with a focus on significant ridgelines in South Diamond Bar.

**Policy SDB-11: Multi-Jurisdiction Collaboration.** Collaborate with local and regional agencies, such as the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority, on the planning, acquisition, and management of lands containing biological resources in the Puente Hills and South Diamond Bar for their protection and preservation in perpetuity. Identify measures to protect natural and biological resources, and to prevent further habitat fragmentation and loss.

## *VS 7 – Equity-Driven, Informed and Involved*

**Policy SDB-12:** Partner with local and regional organizations, businesses, and schools to develop programs for under-resourced individuals and youth to learn about natural resources and ecosystem benefits within South Diamond Bar. Utilize trails and the natural landscape for immersive programs that provide education for instilling stewardship and long-term preservation for the environment.

## **Implementation Actions and Programs**

In addition to the General Plan and ESGVAP areawide implementation program and actions identified in the ten element topics, the following are applicable to the South Diamond Bar community.

### *1. Significant Ridgeline Protections*

A map and ordinance should be prepared identifying significant ridgelines for preservation. Regulatory controls on development should be adopted by ordinance either for the ESGV planning area or through a countywide program.

### *2. Open Space and Habitat Master Plan and Land Acquisition Strategy*

Currently the County does not have an adopted countywide coordinated master plan for prioritizing land acquisition and managing and preserving resource-sensitive lands and open space areas. As habitat becomes increasingly fragmented a planning document with identified criteria for preservation and acquisition, priority acquisitions sites for wildlife connectivity, conservation and land management goals, and funding sources and methods for lands acquisition would be strategic to focus conservation efforts.

The Puente Hills contain severely threatened and rare biological resources. In collaboration with other local agencies, such as the Puente Hills Habitat Authority, and conservation organizations plans should be developed to identify priority conservation lands for acquisition to preserve and protect the remaining habitat areas. The County should also coordinate with other local jurisdictions to develop a cross-jurisdictional plan whose purpose is to identify and propose a range of methods and strategies to acquire land with sensitive biological resources, to identify priority resources to protect and related parcels to acquire, especially for the Puente Hills to Chino Hills areas, and the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. The plan should also develop a management plan for preserved lands to maintain maximum biodiversity and protection of biological resources.

This effort would be strengthened by collaboration with other agencies and jurisdictions to leverage resources and further the impact. A habitat-supportive connected network throughout the ESGV between the San Gabriel Mountain foothills, Puente Hills, hillsides, ridgelines, canyons, drainages, and San Gabriel River would provide vast benefits for the well-being of all.

### *3. Wildlife Connectivity Ordinance*

Draft a Wildlife Connectivity Ordinance that aims to preserve the open space and undeveloped habitat in the Puente Hills and San Gabriel Mountain foothills. Protecting these VHFHSZs from the encroachment of development will help curtail the predicted frequency and intensity of wildfires in the years to come. As nearly all contemporary wildfires are the result of human development and infrastructure, including power lines, car sparks and other human sources. Development in existing wildlands would increase the ignition risk and place surrounding communities in grave danger, in addition to imperiling already threatened habitat and wildlife. Habitat loss and wildfire are the primary threats to threatened and endangered species and habitat. The development of the ordinance should include a review of precedent wildlife connectivity ordinances, an assessment of effectiveness of the ordinances and methods or strategies for improvement, and engagement and collaboration with local conservation agencies and NGOs.

#### *4. Wildlife Crossing Studies*

In coordination with other County departments and local agencies, assess wildlife crossing needs in ESGV and identify locations for needed safe crossings in the Puente Hills and the larger ESGV region. The location of needed safe and separated wildlife crossing should be communicated and their construction coordinated with PW, Caltrans, and other jurisdictions in the ESGV where wildlife crossing needs have been identified.